

Education and Graduate Unemployment in Awka South, Nigeria

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Abstract

Education is one of the bases for employment but most graduates tend to suffer unemployment in spite of the knowledge and skills they may have acquired during their academic years. In view of this, this study tried to find out the extent to which the educational system in Nigerian tertiary institutions has successfully made graduates employable upon graduation. This study investigated the Nigerian educational system especially as it seemed to have relied more on theoretical than practical learning. The study gave answers to three research questions and adopted the role theory as was propounded by Ralph Linton and George Herbert Mead. The researchers adopted a qualitative research design and interviewed 15 Key Persons. Data were collected through observation and Key Persons Interview. The research findings revealed that the entrepreneurship education and the industrial training exercise was an effective tool for reducing the rate of graduate unemployment in Awka south. But the short falls of these tools vary from the lack of funds to get materials for entrepreneurship practicals to the lack of industrial training placement and the demand for those seeking industrial training placement to pay an acceptance fee by the organization where they seek to do their industrial training exercise. The study therefore recommended that school management collaborates with organizations to find industrial training placement for students and also, that government funds be made available for entrepreneurship practicals.

Keywords: Education, Entrepreneurship education, Graduate Unemployment, Industrial Training.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the process of imparting knowledge and skills into an individual through learning. This learning process provides the necessary skills needed for individuals of a society to effectively fit into their chosen discipline, earn a living and most times, it serves as the basis of employment in Nigeria. Sani and Timothy (14) stated that, education provides the skills and competences required for living a productive life. Okobia, Banwunna, Osajie (8) further stated that, education is not just the machinery for transmitting the cultural heritage but a means through which the entire person is developed so as to live successfully in the society.

Nwambam&Eze (6) conventionally stated that, education is the process through which worthwhile knowledge, skills, values, morals and norms of the society is transmitted to members of a society from one generation to another. Thus, education revolves around the transmission of knowledge and skills so as to enable the individual achieve relevance and full potentials in the society.

Education performs multiple functions. While making individuals in a society knowledgeable, it also ensures that individuals are able to gain employment and contribute their quota to the socio-economic development of the society. Delacroix (4) stated that education serves to pass on cultural values, develop critical minds and train specialized skills.

But he further noted that the promise of education cannot be fulfilled if university graduates become dissatisfied, disillusioned and abject due to unemployment.

Unemployment is a state by which individuals of a society that has attained the working age and possesses the required competences, skills and knowledge to work, and are willing to work but are unable to work due to the lack of employment opportunities. Anyebe (2) defined unemployment in Nigeria as the proportion of the labour force that was available for work but did not work due to the unavailability of work. In line with this, the International Labour Organization (ILO) defined the unemployed as those who are economically active but are without work even though, are available for work and seeking to work. This population includes people who lost their jobs and those who have left jobs voluntarily (1).

Osumah and Osaghae (11) posit that the level of unemployment rises when the inflow (the newly absorbed) exceeds outflows (persons getting new jobs or quitting the labour force). According to them, the different categories of unemployed persons includes: sacked people or redundant ones (job losers), temporarily laid off but eventually being retired and those who voluntarily quit their present jobs. Besides, inflow to unemployment can also come from people

not previously in the labour force such as graduates (5).

Unemployment is one of the developmental problems that every developing economy faces in the 21st century (12). The inability of youths (graduates) to be gainfully employed upon graduation in Nigeria has attained a more worrisome dimension especially as some graduates who are unemployed seem to have taken to crime to survive. Though, most of these youths may have been willing to work having attained the working age and requisite skills for work upon graduation but the inability to be gainfully employed have forced them into seeking other means of survival.

Obasan and Yomi (7) asserts that despite increasing the rate of crime in the country, unemployment has also increased the rate of brain drain as many of the country's best brains are lost to other countries through the migration of able-bodied youths for better employment opportunities.

It is also on record that, those who migrate make up the productive and active population of every country. This population are those who propel development in any country and majority of this population are most at times, graduates (7). Onuoha (10) asserts that this population constitutes two third of the total of the country's population but, about 60%, live below poverty line due to unemployment. It is against this backdrop that this study investigated the educational system in Nigeria and the extent to which it has been able to shun out employable graduates upon graduation and reduced the rate of graduate unemployment in the country.

Statement of the Problem

Education provides the knowledge and basis for employment in Nigeria. However, the education system in Nigeria may not have sufficiently provided the knowledge that makes students employable in contemporary times. Most learning processes may have relied more on impacting theoretical knowledge without laying much emphasis on practical knowledge. Even at this, the quality of education in the country continues to decline as some graduates who graduate from most tertiary institutions tend to lack the marketable skills like computer literacy, interpersonal relations etc. that should make them employable.

Even when the government and school authorities may have added 'industrial training' to their schools' curriculum to give students an incite of what is expected in an organization, students may not have acquired these skills. The government may have further introduced entrepreneurial education to reduce the dependence on white collar jobs and increase the rate of self-employment in the absence of

employment. This form of education may have been supported by the school authorities and the government but, it may not have been funded adequately to yield positive result.

Research Questions

1. How has the entrepreneurial education and industrial training exercise successful tackle the rate of graduate unemployment in Awka South LGA?
2. What are the challenges of the entrepreneurship education and the industrial training exercise amongst undergraduates of tertiary institutions?
3. How can the educational structure in Nigeria be modified to ensure that graduates are employable or acquire skills that can make them self-employed upon graduation?

Significance of the Study

This study added to existing literature on education and graduate unemployment in Nigeria and serves as a referencing material for other researchers. This study also exposes the problem of the educational sector and further made recommendation that will enable the educational sector curb graduate unemployment in Nigeria.

Aims of the Study

This study sought to investigate the education system in Nigeria and the extent to which it has effectively tackle graduate unemployment in Awka South LGA.

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE

Olukayode (9) carried out a study titled "Graduate Unemployment in Nigeria: Causes, Consequences and Remediable Approaches." The study explored the phenomenon of graduate unemployment as well as its causal factors, consequences and remedies in Nigeria. Using quantitative research method, data were collected from 360 Abuja (Nigeria Federal Capital) based professionals through a self-administered questionnaire structured in line with the modified Likert scale. The respondents were selected using purposive sampling technique and the choice of these participants was influenced by their orientation in people value added and experience in development planning in the country. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentages, mean and standard deviation and Kurtosis. The study identified a combination of causal factors as responsible for the aggravated incidence of graduate unemployment in Nigeria. Findings also indicated that the socio-economic implications of graduate unemployment on the nation and affected individuals were gruesome. Aside from being a waste of human capital on the nation, those caught in the web were often susceptible to frustration and non-conforming behaviours. Furthermore, findings showed that there was no

effective collaboration between universities and labour employers in providing relevant skills required for employability and employment fulfillment of university graduates. From the perspective of remediable measures, the study found amongst others, counter-active top down approach to job creation programme design and implementation as pathway to graduate unemployment reduction in Nigeria. The study concluded that graduate unemployment was one of the Nigerian's socio-economic challenges and to remediate this social ordeal would require soft wired deliberate policies of government, innovative all all-inclusive approach and concerted efforts of various stakeholders in the country.

Broekhuizen (3) investigated Graduate unemployment and Higher Education Institutions in South Africa. This paper examined graduate unemployment and employment in South Africa with specific emphasis on the type and quality of higher education using multiple labour force survey and administrative datasets. The analysis shows that graduate unemployment in South Africa is not only low in relation to overall unemployment in the country, but that much of the racially-delineated differentials in graduate unemployment and employment outcomes can likely be attributed to heterogeneity in the quality and type of higher education institutions commonly attended by individuals from different racial backgrounds.

Rotimi, Enimola and Ochidi (13) investigated Entrepreneurship Education and Graduate Unemployment in Kogi State. The study aimed at the inclusion of entrepreneurship in the education curriculum and the inability of graduates to get jobs in Kogi State. Thus, entrepreneurship education and its impact on graduate unemployment were investigated. A descriptive survey design was used to achieve the study's objectives. Six (6) higher institutions in Kogi State were chosen to make up the study's population. Due to the nature of the research, we concentrated on students. The study determined the sample size of 385. Inferential and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data gathered. Multiple regression analysis (inferential statistics) was applied to unveil the impact of independent variables on the dependent variable. The finding showed that entrepreneurship education has a significant effect on the unemployment rate of graduates in Kogi state. The study concluded that entrepreneurship in the education curriculum can influence a reduction in the unemployment rate of graduates in Kogi State. The study recommended the review of policy relative to entrepreneurial education to enhance the high degree of its effectiveness in Kogi State higher institutions.

These studies are departure from the present study that investigated education and graduate unemployment in Awka South LGA. This present study laid more emphasis on the entrepreneurial education and the industrial training exercise of the Nigeria's educational system and also, relied on the data derived through observation and the Key Persons Interview.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the role theory that was propounded by Ralph Linto and George Herbert Mead because it dealt with the roles and expectations of individuals of the society as members of the society. This theory postulates that the society has a set of expectations that are presumed to define particular positions or statuses and their behaviour towards these roles are goal oriented.

Thus, the society expects that all the necessary knowledge and skills that are necessary for being employed must have been inculcated into graduates upon graduation. It also expects that graduates be employed and earn a living without depending on their parents or guardians. While it is the responsibility of tertiary institution to ensure that every graduate meets this expectation in some cases the institution fails to carry out this expectation. Similarly, when institutions fails to inculcate the necessary skills and knowledge into student or the government fails to provide the resources and environment for such learning process or the students fail in the of acquiring skills and knowledge that are necessary to them as student, these students may not be employable or able to engage in self-employment in the long run.

Thus, the inability of the institution, the government and the students to effectively carry out their roles as expected by the society results in the increased graduate unemployment that Nigeria is experiencing, presently.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study investigated the extent to which the educational system in Nigeria has effectively tackled the growing rate of graduate unemployment in Awka South LGA. The study adopted a qualitative research design because it will enable the researchers understand why graduates tend to end up unemployed even after acquiring education. The data used for this study was collected through Key Persons Interview (KPI) and observation. The key persons who were interviewed comprised of ten graduates who have been unemployed for five years and more and who studied courses that go for industrial training in Awka South LGA and five lecturers of entrepreneurial education in Nigerian institutions. The interview with the lecturers is aimed at asserting if the challenges of these lecturers face are unique to their environment or

similar. The key persons interviewees comprised of fifteen persons. The research findings will be analysed using the thematic approach for better comprehension of the issue under study.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

How has the entrepreneurial education and industrial training exercise successful tackle the rate of graduate unemployment in Awka South LGA?

All the interviewees stated that entrepreneurial education is a successful tool for reducing unemployment but one of the interviewees stated that it can only be effective if it is properly financed. He stated that the government has failed to provide the much needed infrastructure for entrepreneurial studies and the institutions do not have sponsors so they have to rely on the contributions students make for practical. All the lecturers of entrepreneurial education stated that they divide the class into groups and give them a project to discover something and produce. They further stated that they encourage students who have skills to teach others so they could also learn from it.

Three of the lecturers stated that some of the students do not take entrepreneurial education seriously and most of them do not practice the skills that they have been taught afterwards. One of them stated that the students see entrepreneurial education as a course which they must pass in order to graduate without seeing its further relevance.

The graduates agreed that entrepreneurial education is a good tool that can be used to reduce the rate of unemployment in the country. Two of them stated that they were able to learn how to make soap and bleach and have been making bleach and soap since then. Three others stated that they had acquired a skill before their admission into the university and it has been profitable even though the patronage has not been much. Others stated that they have been unemployed since their graduation and have gone for lots of interviews.

All the graduates affirmed that they had to contribute money in their entrepreneurial class and that, their school lacked the infrastructure to study entrepreneurship but they all agreed to have taken the course in the university.

All the interviewees affirmed that the essence of the industrial training exercise was to give students an exposure to the industrial experience and expose them to the practical aspects of what they are being taught in class. But they stated that it does not guarantee employment upon graduation.

Five of the graduates stated that they did the industrial training while five others stated that they did not do the industrial training exercise. Four of

those who did the industrial training exercise said they were not paid in their place of industrial training. Two of those who did industrial training said they had to pay for their placement in the company. Four others said they were rejected in all the organizations they went to however, two stated that they eventually got a place but were used more as a secretary which was a departure from what they studied in school. They further stated that their industrial training report was fabricated based on their observation in the organization.

Two of the interviewed lecturers stated that the industrial training exercise is an essential part of education. Three of the lecturers stated that in their school a supervisory body is established to go to the organization where students claim to be doing their industrial attachment so as to affirm if they are actually doing the industrial training. Four of the lecturers added that getting a place for industrial training is increasingly becoming difficult but it is also important for students to gain that knowledge.

What are the challenges of the entrepreneurship education and the industrial training exercise amongst under-graduates of tertiary institutions?

All the interviewees stated that finance was a major challenge in entrepreneurship education. One of the lecturers stated that they are faced with lack of finance to finance the materials used for practical and thus, they have to task the students. One of the graduates stated that overcrowding is a major challenge. She stated that being a General Studies (GST) course, the class is usually too small for the number of students taking the course and one will have to come early to sit at the front roll so as to hear the lecturer while teaching. She further stated that in most cases, this is not possible.

Another interviewee that overheard her, suggested that lecturers who teach such courses make use of microphone; provided by the school or the lecturer to aid learning.

One of the graduates that were interviewed stated that it is a major challenge to get an organization for industrial training as most organizations do not accept industrial training students. Another graduate stated that even when a student gets a place for industrial training, that student is not being paid instead; the organization asks to be paid for making an industrial training placement for the student.

Another graduate added that, the industrial training exercise is more like allowing oneself to be used as errand boy/girl or messenger. This according to him is because the employees in the organization do not give the student any task that relates to the organizational task. Rather, they keep sending the student on errands to buy things like food for them.

How can the educational structure in Nigeria be modified to ensure that graduates are employable or acquire skills that can make them self-employed upon graduation?

All the lecturers stated that the government has not provided the enabling environment and the resources for entrepreneurial studies. They therefore stated that this is a major challenge facing entrepreneurial education in Nigeria. Two of the lecturers further stated that school authorities collaborate with employers to enable industrial training students get industrial training placement easily. Two graduates further stated that, employers of labour should also, help student by employing them in their company and their employment should also be free.

Findings from the Observation

It was observed that the rate of graduate unemployment in the country has increased tremendously and has doubled especially as the various universities continue to produce more graduates yearly. This may have prompted the government to introduce entrepreneurial education however; it was observed that no provision was made for the materials needed for entrepreneurial education.

It was also observed that the industrial training was another technique that was aimed at making graduates employable upon graduation. But most students tend to find it difficult getting an industrial training placement in Nigeria except if they or their families are connected to the employer, one way or the other.

DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Entrepreneurship education is a tool for reducing the rate of unemployment in the country but it has not been able to achieve much in the aspect of creating job opportunities due to the inability of the government to provide the enabling environment and resources necessary for such learning. The lecturers have however improvised by dividing the members of the classroom into groups and asking them to fund their own entrepreneurship practicals.

The study also found out that the industrial training is a good academic exercise but even though the schools have put some measures in place to ensure transparency in the system, some students do not partake in the industrial training exercise. But those who participated in the exercise acquired some industrial knowledge which placed them at an advantage during their search for employment.

It was also discovered that factors affecting the effectiveness of the industrial training exercise is, the lack of acceptance of industrial training students, allocating a job description different from the course of study to industrial training students, the non-

payment of industrial training students and the monetary requirement required of industrial training students before they are allowed into the company to do their industrial training.

The study further found out that if school authorities collaborate with organizations, it will be easier for industrial training students to get a placement and the likelihood to demand for payment will be minimised. It was also found out that the provision of materials like chemicals and other things necessary for entrepreneurial education reduces the rate of unemployment through entrepreneurial education.

CONCLUSION

Education has a substantial impact on employment as it enables graduates acquire the knowledge and skills that makes them employable in the society. These knowledge and skills are acquired theoretically and practically and has significant impact on the knowledge graduates have upon graduation. This also, has an impact on the employability and the ability of graduates to retain their jobs after getting employed and create jobs upon graduation. However, due to financial constraints and overcrowding in classed, the entrepreneurship education has not made much impact on students. In a similar context, the industrial training exercise has also not impacted greatly on student due the lack of places to carry out the industrial training exercise, the financial demand of employers on students, and the fabrication of Industrial training report by students who did not do their Industrial training exercise.

All these, seem to have made graduate employment a fallacy even with the industrial training exercise and the introduction of the entrepreneurship education in tertiary institutions. Therefore, it is pertinent to tackle the lapses in these academic programmes so to effectively produce employable graduates and self-reliance graduates who will not depend on white-collar job to earn their living but create jobs in the absence of none.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made. They are;

1. School authorities should collaborate with companies to easily assign companies to industrial training students as this will ensure that the job description assigned to industrial training students are part of their discipline. It will also ensure that all students do the industrial training and discourage the payment by students to get industrial training placement.
2. Government should make provisions to fund entrepreneurial education. School authorities should get sponsors to sponsor entrepreneurial practicals and also aid the

sales of items produced in entrepreneurial practicals so as to generate finance internally.

3. Furthermore, students should sincerely and wholeheartedly take part in their Industrial Training programme and their entrepreneurial education so as to effectively acquire the skills needed for employment or self-employment upon graduation.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The Key Persons Interviewees were not accessible. While some of them stated categorically that they didn't want to be interviewed as they were not interested, some others stated that they were busy. The researcher however, was able to convince them that the study was strictly for academic purpose and that, their personal information like their name etc. was not needed. The interview was therefore, rescheduled to suit the programme of the Key Persons Interviewees for their own convenience.

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